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FOR NEA/ARP:AMACDONALD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/16/2019

TAGS: PREL PHUM PREF KIRF

SUBJECT: INTERIOR MINISTER GIVES AMBASSADOR ASSURANCES ON  
RELEASED PRISONERS, REYDA JEWISH COMMUNITY AND SECURITY  
COOPERATION

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen A. Seche for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

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¶1. (C) The Minister of Interior gave the Ambassador on February 16 assurances on a number of issues ranging from reports of recently released al-Qaeda suspects to information sharing with the Embassy to the protection of Yemen's Jewish community. While Post is relatively confident that the issues concerning the Reyda Jews will be addressed, we are less sanguine about Ministry assurances on other issues. End Summary.

Prisoners

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¶2. (C) Interior Minister Mutaher al-Masri denied to the Ambassador that any of the 108 prisoners recently released in Yemen were members of al-Qaeda. In a February 16 meeting, Masri delineated the releasees into three groups: parole violators, prisoners transferred to Yemen from Saudi Arabia against whom there is no evidence of wrongdoing, and prisoners who had been tried and acquitted. The Interior Minister asserted that the released prisoners posed no danger and assured the Ambassador that, if they had been members of al-Qaeda, they would never have been released. The Ambassador pressed Masri to provide the names of the releasees. Masri replied that he did not have the information at hand, but had no objection to turning it over and would follow up.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador also pressed Masri on reports that wanted terrorist Jaber al-Banna will be released presently from a Yemeni prison, since an appeals court is expected to reduce his sentence. The Minister told the Ambassador that al-Banna will not be released without serving out his sentence in full.

Reyda Jewish Community

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¶4. (C) The Ambassador raised the disposition of the Jewish community from the town of Reyda. Members of this community, who feel in danger after the murder of one of their number and harassment from their neighbors, are seeking to emigrate to Israel or the United States. Seven or eight of the families have been waiting to receive passports for several weeks. (Note: Other Yemenis usually receive their passports within a day or two. End Note.) Masri said that this was the first that he had heard of the issue and that he will look into it.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador reminded the Minister that a verdict is expected soon in the case of the accused murderer of a member of the community and his family has threatened to "kill the Jews" if he is sentenced to death. The Ambassador

asked the Minister to make provisions to ensure the community's safety. Masri thanked the Ambassador for alerting him to the problem and said that he would see to it.  
(Note. Media reports on February 17 indicate the ruling in the case is now expected March 2 or 3. End note.)

Cooperation  
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¶6. (C) The Ambassador asked the Minister what progress had been made on an FBI request for original documents to be used in the prosecution of two suspected conspirators in the bombing of the USS Cole. Masri said that he had not received the original diplomatic note making the request, but when he receives it, he will forward it to the appropriate agency. The Ambassador also raised a number of outstanding requests for cooperation from the Ministry in the investigation into the September attack on the Embassy. Masri claimed not to have received any written requests. (Note: LEGATT has sent numerous written requests for this cooperation and will be providing copies of this correspondence to the Ministry. End Note.) The Ambassador asked the Minister if written requests will likely receive a favorable response. Masri responded that he "will look at them."

Comment  
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¶7. (C) Masri's assurances on the recent releases from prison are consistent with the ROYG's official stance. The Ministry of Interior under Masri has a bad track record concerning information sharing and other law-enforcement cooperation after the embassy attack. Post does not expect a sudden

turnabout on this issue but will continue to press it. The ROYG, on the other hand, has shown a desire to cooperate on the issue of the Reyda community, and Post expects that the Ministry of Interior will take steps to protect Yemen's Jews and resolve the passport question. End Comment.

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